



CeMHOR  Arkansas
Center for Mental Healthcare
& Outcomes Research
Research Enhancement Award Program

Little Rock

Research Enhancement Award Program

Director: Richard R. Owen, MD

Executive Summary for Fiscal Year 2008

Facing CeMHOR at the start of FY2008 was a series of formidable challenges that we have addressed with renewed determination and productivity. Our mission is to develop, implement and disseminate policy-relevant and clinically relevant health services research to improve the mental health and care of veterans. Our research focus evolved from developing outcomes assessment modules for depression, dementia, schizophrenia and substance use disorders (SUDs)—to quality measurement and quality-outcome relationships for these disorders, with interest in treatment adherence as a predictor of positive outcomes—to developing and testing interventions to improve care for patients with these disorders. CeMHOR's focus aligns closely with health system needs, given the prevalence of mental health problems of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans. Several investigators are concentrating on understanding these veterans' health care needs and developing interventions to increase their access to treatment for mental health problems. Among Center achievements during FY2008 was increasing productivity—in preparation to reapply for HSR&D Center of Excellence (CoE) funding—while dealing with adverse situations detailed below.

In FY2008, CeMHOR had total funding of \$8.2 million, with \$3.1 million from VA. Our 11 investigators, four associate investigators and two affiliate investigators pursued research on 34 projects and activities, six of them new HSR&D grants; reported 57 disseminated research products, with 24 additional journal articles in press at the end of the year; and held 51 leadership roles, many of them significant service and leadership roles in HSR&D. We also delivered key services to VA (HSR&D and ORD) as well as other national organizations and agencies, and we noted several key impacts and systems improvements.

A combination of a temporary research restriction and VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report on human subjects protection violations presented serious tests for the Research Service at Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS). As FY2008 began, investigators were dealing with the impact of the restriction imposed by the VA Office of Research & Development (ORD). Preliminary ORD findings did not suggest harm or injury to any patients or research subjects, but they did raise issues related to research documentation, reporting and oversight processes. Effective Aug. 31, 2007, no new human research studies could begin and no participants could be newly enrolled in a research project unless enrollment was essential for the individual's health. At the same time, CAVHS began developing its own Institutional Review Board (IRB) for oversight of human research.

On Aug. 6, 2008, the OIG report was released, substantiating violations in the areas of informed consent and adverse event reporting and finding that the IRB at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS),

the Medical Center's IRB of record, failed to address noncompliance. No CeMHOR studies or investigators were cited or implicated in any way, and there was no finding of harm or injury to a subject as a result of noncompliance. Our augmenting the Research Service was crucial to its operation during a stressful period and its development of a new IRB. Drs. Owen and Hudson advised and supported the ACOS/R&D on guidelines, timelines, IRB membership and data security. Dr. Owen's contributions to the CAVHS ORD were reflected in his being named Deputy ACOS/R&D.

CeMHOR goals for FY2008 are to: sustain a superior environment for inquiry to generate and support the highest-quality mental health services research; increase capacity in the mental health services research field by training, mentoring, recruiting and collaborating; develop and test innovative services interventions to improve care for veterans with mental health and/or substance use disorders; conduct research to better understand common mental health problems and service needs of OIF/OEF veterans; pursue a research agenda to promote transformation to a recovery-oriented mental health system in the VHA; and promote widespread dissemination and implementation of effective interventions into routine practice.